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ABSTRACT

A project studied 30 displaced homemakers who had participated successfully in the Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools Displaced Homemakers/Non-Traditional Job Exploration Program. Personal interviews were accompanied by a statistical sheet, gathering the individual history of the interviewee. All persons interviewed felt their situations were much improved since entry into the program, but lingering insecurities were evident. Most first jobs were low paying with difficult working hours and few benefits. Many participants had one or two jobs that had not worked out. During the first year on the job, displaced homemakers commonly felt very insecure. Self-esteem and self-confidence were practically non-existent at point of program entry. Self-assessment, personal skill building, and study of employability skills were effective as combined in Job Seeking Skills for Displaced Homemakers classes. The project indicated that the class would be more effective if expanded to include communication skills, self-image building, etc. The emotional support and encouragement supplied through interactions of students in the classes and in other program activities is vital in establishing self-confidence. Vocational classes were most effective after other confidence-building activities had begun to show results. (The interview schedule and information sheet are appended.) (YLB)

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Displaced Homemaker Job Seeking and Job Keeping Research Project

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Final Report
June, 1985

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Jefferson County Public Schools
Adult Education

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER
OFFERING EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

ABSTRACT

The Displaced Homemaker Job Seeking and Job Keeping Research Project will study thirty displaced homemakers who have participated successfully in the Jefferson County Public Schools Displaced Homemakers/Non-Traditional Job Exploration Program. Factors contributing to their overcoming obstacles to the extent that they are now employed will be analyzed. Information about problems on the job, attitudes, needs, etc. will also be gathered.

BACKGROUND

Jefferson County Public Schools Adult Education in Louisville, Kentucky, operates a Displaced Homemaker Program. The focus of the program is to assist divorced, widowed, married women, (and men who qualify), and single parents who need employment. This assistance is offered in the form of counseling and involvement in employability skills classes especially designed for displaced homemakers, vocational classes, and special programs for personal development.

In an effort to improve the existing program and share information with other programs, the Kentucky Department of Education's Research and Development Unit supported this project. Thirty women who had participated in this Displaced Homemaker Program and who had subsequently become stably employed were studied.

METHOD AND INSTRUMENT

Each participant responded to the same set of questions which were asked verbally and the conversation tape-recorded for later study. (APPENDIX A) The interviewer was a program worker with whom participants were familiar. Each interview lasted about an hour, with a period before the formal interview for re-acquaintance and establishing ease. The setting was the interviewee's home, a restaurant, work-place, or the interviewer's office, and was arranged at the interviewee's convenience. Interviews were done at various times, from morning till night, in order to fit difficult schedules. It was believed that the time and travel involved in the study would produce a personalized and valid result.

Each interview was accompanied by a statistical sheet (APPENDIX B), gathering individual history of the interviewee. This included date-of-birth, educational level, work history, skills and talents, marital status, etc.

TYPES OF WORK

That "success" is relative is certainly borne out in this study. Jobs held for the most part are clerical, sales, cleaning, nursing aides, teaching aides, and apartment management positions. Most workers are in low paying jobs. Many have working hours that are least desirable (night shifts, and hours that are so "flexible" that they vary from day to day, and they may be cut back with little warning). A few have generated their own employment by building on service related trade, e.g. home and office cleaning, sewing, typing at home, etc. This group can make better than minimum wage, and not have day-to-day work expenses (job related attire, lunches, etc.) but give up any benefits to which they might be entitled in another working situation.

PATTERNS IN FINDING JOBS

Many have taken a job or two which hasn't worked out for whatever reason. But once they've been working, it is much easier for them to find another (and better) job. This seems to be because of a confidence factor - once they realize they can obtain and be competent in a job, the sense of self-worth is high enough that they can break away by choice and search out something more suitable. The capacity to move on or "up" comes with the realization that they have some control over work and working conditions.

PATTERNS IN FINDING JOBS (Con't.)

This process has taken many clients two or three years; they are also the most satisfied and secure of the group. That this emergence is a pattern is not completely borne out by this study (because not all participants have been working for that long a period), but it seems very likely.

For most participants the first year at a job finds them filled with an inner anxiety and insecurity, even though they are judged competent and receive promotions. These feelings seem to be a natural transitional process. To know of this apparent phenomenon should be encouraging to other displaced homemakers who are just starting out. At first they are too busy trying to overcome the insecurity to see that they are building exactly what they are going after.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY GROUP

The oldest participant was 59, the youngest 30, but the majority were in their 40's and 50's, two of them having had thirty-seven year marriages. Most had little actual work experience or high school educations. Three had some college. One did not complete high school. Those with specific skills are not making more money - or much more - than those without. Skill, in the initial job-hunt for this group, did not seem to matter as much as did determination, positive attitude, and willingness.

MOTIVATIONAL PROCESSES

It is these traits, determination, positive attitude, and willingness, that this program hopes to foster in clients.

To build up to that point takes a lot of progress for most displaced homemakers. The self-esteem and self-confidence of the research interviewees at the time of program entry was, for everyone, very low. Three out of the thirty needed encouragement and information about how to go about finding and obtaining a job, and in a few weeks had done just that. The rest needed to explore their own talents and skills and job possibilities with much help from teachers and other workers in the program, as they initially were depressed and could think of no possible directions. This very low self-esteem and lack of direction is typical, but each person felt alone in this helpless feeling until she discovered a whole group with the same problem.

Being in a group of other displaced homemakers and having a good bit of interaction proved to be very important in gathering self-confidence and, thus, a job. Therefore, it is vital that clients attend meetings and classes as a group, and not be "sent" to classes (even to learn specific skills) unless it is in combination with a personally supportive class or group activity . . . (isolated skill-building classes did not motivate in this case and did not influence job-getting even though that student is more skilled).

The theme of anxiety, helplessness, low self-esteem, and desperation ran through this group as the state of mind when each began the program in the Job Seeking Skills for Displaced Homemakers Classes. Included in this group as reascn for need of the class was divorce, widowhood, disability, retirement, or unemployment of spouse. Three of the married women came into the program because of abuse by spouse and the desire to establish independence - one divorced, two are still married but are employed. These women had been completely dependent on their husbands for money, have bad marriages and struggle daily with such problems as abuse, alcoholism, no personal freedom because of spouse imposed

MOTIVATIONAL PROCESSES (Con't.)

restrictions, and the resulting feelings of depression.

All classes, vocational and personal skill building, and meetings with speakers from the community, enlarge the world for this group and build self-confidence slowly.

Short class periods, scheduled once or twice a week, seem to be best for this group. The displaced homemaker may have real or imagined problems in getting out of the home for more frequent or longer periods. Just going to one class is often a giant step, and for certain women, this has to be "thrust" gently; they need time to digest, evaluate, and adjust in order for the personal improvement classes to take root.

Most are in such a bad financial position by the time they get to the program that there's not time for lengthy career planning or study. They are forced to take whatever work they can get, and consider themselves lucky to get that.

Simple as it may sound, this research shows that what they initially need is encouragement and instruction on how a job-search is done. This is best taught by teachers who are trained in employability and counseling skills.

IMPLICATIONS/RESULTS

Expansion plans for the 1985-86 program are based on responses by research project participants who were helped most by vocational exploration, self-image building, and other personal-skills included in the Job Seeking Skills Class. Participants expressed an opinion that this class should last a longer time as a supportive measure as well as an instructive one. Based on their responses, employability skills classes will now be expanded to include more communication skills, vocational exploration, assertiveness training, coping skills (this includes learning community resources, stress management techniques, and whatever the teacher of each class decides will help the particular group the most), a study of jobs - traditional and non-traditional - a study of possible problems on the job, as well as the study of the job market, search, application, resume, interview, etc.

After clients have been through this course, they may continue with Job Clubs and counseling offered by the program as well as a rich supply of vocational classes.

The value of the vocational classes is not meant to be down-played in this report. However, the study shows that they are most valuable to clients after the clients have become motivated by the Job Seeking Skills for the Displaced Homemaker Classes. All persons interviewed want to continue vocational classes for job upgrade, but none attributed their finding and keeping a job to these classes. They are, however, using learned skills on the job, and are very serious in continuing to learn more in order to advance.

All classes offered the participants were well received and appreciated; for twenty-four out of the research group, these classes are the only ones they have taken since finishing, or quitting, high school.

IMPLICATIONS/RESULTS (Con't.)

Only one participant in the study had ever planned to be self-supporting. This lack of planning hangs over them as a reminder of vulnerability, and, for some, it hides a hope that their days as self-supporters are numbered.

Problems on the job are those of possible sexual harassment (one instance), discrimination felt by several "older" workers and one Hispanic participant, and not knowing how to handle being the only woman working with a crew of men (three instances).

The general consensus was that there was no help the Displaced Homemaker Program could render in these areas, but discussion in classes and meetings can address, if not "head off", these problems. Future workers can be forwarned and thus teach them to handle situations as they come up.

SUMMARY AND CAPSULE REPORT

All persons interviewed felt that their situations were much improved since entry into the program, but lingering insecurities are evident.

This study reinforced the importance of the Displaced Homemaker Program as a resource, and established guidelines and expectations for emergence of present and future program members.

It is hoped that this report will help other Displaced Homemaker Programs as well. Listed below is a summary of the study:

1. Most first jobs were low paying with difficult working hours and few benefits.

2. Many participants held one or two jobs which either served as stepping stones to a better job, or did not work-out and forced them to start another job hunt. Confidence formed in first jobs enabled them to move forward in the quality of jobs obtained subsequently.

3. It was common the first year on the job for the displaced homemaker to feel very insecure, personally and on-the-job. Even though, as a worker, much progress was being made, it was difficult for the subject to appreciate it until some time had passed.

4. Self-esteem and self-confidence were practically non-existent at point of program entry. Self-assessment, personal skills built, and study of employ-ability skills were effective as combined in Job Seeking Skills for Displaced Homemakers. This project indicates that this class would be more effective if expanded to include communication skills, self-image building, etc.

5. The emotional support and encouragement supplied through interaction of students in the Job Seeking Skills for Displaced Homemakers classes and in other program activities indicated that this support is vital in establishing self-confidence. Each participant had felt isolated before entering the program and finding other displaced homemakers.

6. Vocational classes are most effective after other confidence-building activities have begun to show results. The student is then more receptive and psychologically ready to learn new skills, and is more directed in choosing appropriate areas of study.

1. When did you decide that you needed gainful employment?

2. What was the deciding factor?

3. What would be the words which would best describe your state of mind when you first approached the Displaced Homemaker Program?

4. What other avenues of assistance did you have?

5. How did you learn about the program?

6. In what ways did you participate?

7. What part of the program did you feel helped you most?

8. What part of the program did you feel helped you least?

9. What would you like to see added?

10. How long did it take you to feel that you were gaining some direction toward becoming employable?

11. What influencing factors existed during this time (ie. types of training obtained, personal development occuring, etc.)?

12. How did you find your employment?

13. How long did it take for you to find this employment?

14. In your opinion, did the services of the Displaced Homemaker Program contribute directly, indirectly, or at all, to your finding this employment?

    a. If a contribution was made, please describe.

15. Had you ever planned to be or expected to be self-supporting?

16. Do you feel that you need continuing support in the form of classes or group meetings now that you are employed?

17. What problems are you having on the job?

    a. What can we do to help you with these problems?

    b. What could we have done to help you prevent these problems?

18. What words would best describe your overall situation now?

_____

Date of Birth _____

Marital Status _____
if married, is spouse disabled, unemployed...? _____
Is spouse living separately? _____

Marital history (length of marriage and any other relevant information)

_____

_____

Number of children _____

ages _____

Work experience (including number of years) _____

_____

_____

Educational level _____

Vocational Training and skills now being used on the job _____

_____

_____

Previous vocational training and skills _____

_____

_____

Volunteer experience _____

_____

Talents, hobbies, interests _____

_____

_____